



31.1995.1 Leora Brown School

Harrison County

Marker Text Review Report

10/21/2013

Text

Leora Brown School

Facility built 1891 as elementary and secondary school for African Americans. Originally known as Corydon Colored School; first graduation was on May 14, 1897. Renamed 1987 for Leora Brown Farrow, a teacher at the school, 1924-1950. Rehabilitated as cultural and educational center, 1993.

Review

The Indiana Historical Bureau flagged this marker for review because it lacks primary source evidence supporting the marker claims and context for the events and people described. Upon review, the majority of the marker text is correct. This marker review will present additional primary source evidence to support the marker text and provide context on segregation within Indiana schools and the eventual integration of white and black students.

Statewide legal provisions for an education system in Indiana were first laid out in the state's 1851 Constitution, which required the state government "to provide, by law, for a general and uniform system of Common Schools, wherein tuition shall be without charge and equally open to all."¹ Though the state constitution did not explicitly exclude African Americans from public schools, a series of laws introduced prior set a precedent for racial exclusion.² After the ratification of this constitution, two acts introduced in 1853 and 1855 further restricted African American educational opportunities by barring black students from any educational benefits while exempting African Americans from taxes for school finances.³ Until 1869, few educational opportunities were open to black children with the exception of a handful of private schools created by religious organizations, such as the Quakers.⁴ However, in 1869, Governor Conrad Baker approved a law that enabled all children, without regard to race, to attend *segregated* public schools.⁵

The Corydon Colored School was among the separate African American schools that emerged after Governor Baker's education mandate. Construction of the Corydon Colored School began in 1891, as the marker text states, though the official opening date is unclear. According to a Harrison County deed record, Dora and Amos Lemmon transferred ownership of property in Corydon to the School Trustees of Corydon on June 29, 1891.⁶ Minutes from several school board meetings indicate that the board accepted bids to "build a new school house for colored pupils" on the property purchased, and they selected a contractor, John Mitchell, to construct the



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building.⁷ It is possible that the school house was completed and opened for classes in time for the 1891 school term, though more research is needed to confirm that the Colored School did open its doors in 1891.

The marker text is correct that the school was originally known as Corydon Colored School. Corydon's local newspapers frequently referred to the African American school by this name.⁸ However, supporting documentation only extends into the 1920s. Further research is needed to confirm that this was the official name given to the school from its opening to its closing in 1950. Corydon Colored School served as both a primary and a secondary school when it first opened. The first high school graduation for the colored school took place on May 14, 1897, as the marker text states. According to a May 13, 1897 article in the *Corydon Republican*, the Corydon Colored High School was to present its first graduating class of four students the following day.⁹

The creation of African American schools opened new employment opportunities to educated blacks, like Leora Brown, who became teachers in these institutions. According to a short memoir that Brown wrote, she graduated from Corydon Colored High School in May 1923 and went on to study at the Blaker's Teachers College of Indianapolis. After graduating from college, Brown returned to Corydon in 1924 to teach at the grade school she attended as a child. For 26 years, Brown taught multiple elementary grades at the Corydon Colored School.¹⁰

Despite a rhetoric of "separate but equal," black and white schools were far from equal in terms of the quality of their facilities and educational resources. Black schools were often overcrowded, run-down, and inadequately equipped by comparison to white schools. During Leora Brown's time as a teacher, conditions improved for some African American schools when the state created such black schools as Crispus Attucks High School (1927) in Indianapolis, Lincoln High School (1928) in Evansville, and Roosevelt High School (1931) in Gary.¹¹ Yet poor conditions continued to be a problem at the Corydon Colored School into the 1920s. For example, in 1920, inspectors reported unsatisfactory conditions at the Corydon Colored School, such as an unsanitary water pump.¹²

In 1949, the Indiana state legislature took steps toward eliminating inequality in the education system. The legislature introduced a law which required that schools be "equally open to all and prohibited and denied to none because of race, creed, color, or national origin," and sought to "abolish, eliminate and prohibit segregated and separate schools or school districts on the basis of race, creed or color."¹³ All public schools were ordered to integrate black and white students



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by 1954. As a result, the Corydon Colored School closed in 1950, and its students transferred to formerly all-white schools.¹⁴ Unfortunately, the integration of public schools eliminated teaching positions for many African American educators, including Leora Brown. As the marker states, Brown left the employ of the Corydon Colored School with its closing in 1950. By October 1954, only 27 of the 396 black teachers employed by the Indianapolis school system worked in integrated schools.¹⁵

The marker text is also correct in stating that the Corydon Colored School was renamed in honor of Leora Brown Farrow (married name) in 1987.¹⁶ According to a 1987 article in the *Corydon Democrat*, Maxine F. Brown, Farrow's niece, purchased the school and renamed it after her aunt. Additionally, she restored the building and nominated it for the National Register of Historic Places. Brown began planning the building's restoration several months before her aunt passed away at the age of 82.¹⁷ In 1993, Brown renovated the building again and converted it into a cultural education and community center to "continually educate people about the contributions of the African-American community."¹⁸

¹ Indiana Historical Bureau, *Indiana's Constitution of 1851 Article 8-Education*, <http://www.statelib.lib.in.us/www/ihb/resources/constarticle8.html> (accessed August 7, 2007).

² Such discriminatory legislation included an 1841 act excluding African Americans from a special tax to financially support state public schools and an 1843 law which explicitly excluded black children from public schools. Indiana, *Laws of Indiana*, 1841, 82; Indiana, *Senate Journal*, 1842, 521-522; Indiana, *Laws of Indiana (Revised Statutes)*, 1843, 320.

³ Indiana, *Laws of Indiana*, 1853, 124; Indiana, *Laws of Indiana*, 1855, 161.

⁴ Emma Lou Thornbrough, *The Negro in Indiana: A Study of a Minority* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1957), 166-7.

⁵ Indiana, *Senate Journal*, 1869, 57; Indiana, *Laws of Indiana (special session)*, 1869, 41.

⁶ The Lemmons sold land in lots 172, 173, 184, and 185 in the town of Corydon. Deed of Sale from Dora and Amos Lemmon to School Trustees of Corydon, 29 June 1891 (filed 24 July 1891), Harrison County, Deed Record P-3, p. 245, submitted by applicant.

⁷ James D. Irvin, President, Geo. W. Self, Secretary, meeting minutes, June 22, 1891, submitted by applicant; James D. Irvin, President, Geo. W. Self, Secretary, meeting minutes, July 1, 1891, submitted by applicant.

⁸ "Harrison County," *New Albany Weekly Tribune*, June 4, 1897, n.p., accessed NewspaperArchive.com; "Colored School Notes," *Corydon Republican*, May 28, 1902, p. 1, accessed NewspaperArchive.com; "Colored School Notes,



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Corydon Republican, May 14, 1903, 1, NewspaperArchive.com; “Corydon Colored School Commencement,” *Corydon Republican*, June 1, 1905, 1, accessed NewspaperArchive.com; “Commencement of the Corydon Colored School,” *Corydon Democrat*, May 29, 1912, 1, accessed NewspaperArchive.com; *The Corydon Republican*, October 18, 1923, n.p., accessed NewspaperArchive.com; *The Corydon Republican*, June 2, 1921, n.p., accessed NewspaperArchive.com.

⁹ *Corydon Republican*, May 13, 1897, n.p., accessed NewspaperArchive.com; “First Annual Commencement of the Corydon Colored High School, May 14, 1897,” first page of program reprinted in the History of Corydon & Harrison County Indiana: A Scrapbook of Newspaper Clippings, Volume I, compiled by Frederick P. Griffin (Jasper, IN: Printing Services, Inc., 1991), 129.

¹⁰ In her memoir, Leora Brown Farrow recalled her daily class schedule from 1939-1940, which included lessons for first through eighth grades. Leora Brown Farrow, “This Is My Life,” 3, Black Women in the Middle West Project, 1890-1984, Indiana Historical Society; Leora Brown Farrow, “Daily Schedule, 1939-1940,” Black Women in the Middle West Project, 1890-1984, Indiana Historical Society. For Farrow’s elementary education at the Corydon Colored School, see report card for Leora Brown, n.d., Black Women in the Middle West Project, 1890-1984, Indiana Historical Society. For sources showing that Farrow taught at Corydon Colored School see, “School Children Have Train Ride,” 1945, newspaper clipping, Black Women in the Middle West Project, 1890-1984, Indiana Historical Society; H.A. Tucker, “Indiana Success Schedule,” for Leora Brown, June 10, 1930, Black Women in the Middle West Project, 1890-1984, Indiana Historical Society; H.A. Tucker, “Indiana Success Schedule,” for Leora Brown, June 19, 1930, Black Women in the Middle West Project, 1890-1984, Indiana Historical Society.

¹¹ Warren, *Crispus Attucks High School*, 32; Central Attendance District, *Times Never Forgotten: A History of the Central Attendance District*, (Evansville, 1994), 37.

¹² *The Corydon Republican*, January 8, 1920, 1, accessed NewspaperArchive.com.

¹³ Dwight W. Culver, “Racial Desegregation in Education in Indiana,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 23:3 (1954): 297; “1949 Indiana School Desegregation Law,” accessed [Indiana Historical Society Digital Image Collections](#).

¹⁴ Indiana, *Senate Journal*, 1949, 506, 508, 711-12, 814; Indiana, *Laws of Indiana*, 1949, 603-07; *Indiana House Journal*, 1949, 628-9.

¹⁵ “Pupils Erase Racial Issue Here,” *Indianapolis Times*, October 10, 1954.

¹⁶ Farrow was Leora Brown’s married name.

¹⁷ “Corydon Woman Plans to Restore Historic Summit Street School,” *Corydon Democrat*, April 8, 1987, n.p., in *History of Corydon & Harrison County Indiana: A Scrapbook of Newspaper Clippings*, Volume 1, ed. Frederick P. Griffin (Jasper: Printing Services, Inc., 1991): 131; Leora B. Farrow, [Find-A-Grave.com](#).



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¹⁸ “Teacher’s Daughter Works to Renovate Old Black School,” *Anderson Herald Bulletin*, February 19, 1993, D4, accessed NewspaperArchive.com.